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ABSTRACT

Mississippi State University's revamped undergraduate foreign language program was designed to attract new students interested in job preparedness. The B.S. program is tightly structured to provide students with both general education and expertise in four areas of study essential for a career in world trade: foreign language fluency, proficiency in a second foreign language, expertise in domestic and international business practices, and awareness of the history and political systems of the country of the first foreign language. The new program has provided new focus for previously independent courses of study on foreign languages, business foreign languages, domestic and international business, history, and political science by blending them into a degree program. It has also affected the foreign language program by producing record enrollments, a fourfold increase in majors, and a substantial boost in faculty morale. (MSE)

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THE B.S. IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES AT MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

by

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The B.S. in Foreign Languages at Mississippi State University

A. The State of Foreign Languages Before the B.S. in Foreign Languages Program

At the onset of the 1980's the Department of Foreign Languages at Mississippi State University was tetering on the edge of extinction as as independent unit. The number of Foreign Language majors had dwindled to twelve. Enrollment in upper division FL offerings was so low that courses often had to be cancelled. Because of the poor enrollment figures, the Department was subjected to constant scrutiny and time-consuming reviews submitted to the administration and even the Board of Trustees of Institutions of Higher Learning in Mississippi to justify its existence. A merger with the English Department, elimination of graduate and undergraduate degree programs in foreign languages, and a subsequent reduction of faculty positions were imminent unless the deplorable state of foreign languages at Mississippi State was remedied.

B. Strategy for Implementing the B.S. in Foreign Languages Program

To increase prospects for the survival of the Department of Foreign Languages, a pragmatic alternative degree program to the traditional B.A. in Foreign Languages was needed -- a program that attracted students on the basis of job preparedness for available career opportunities in line with long-term projected national needs. A new degree program was needed that took advantage of the call for graduates proficient in foreign languages coupled with expertise in domestic and international business practices that enabled them to function effectively in the arena of world trade, the fastest growing component of the American economy. This call for a new degree program

exhititing an imaginative fusion of foreign language and business skills with exposure to the culture, history, and political systems of the country or region of the language specialization to meet current and future career needs is reflected in the B.S. in Foreign Languages degree program at Mississippi State University.

C. The B.S. in Foreign Languages Program:

The B.S. in Foreign Languages degree program requires satisfactory completion of 136 semester hours. Of these, approximately 40 semester hours comprise the required college-wide core curriculum consisting of course work in English composition, mathematics, communication, the natural sciences, the humanities, the social sciences, and the fine arts as a foundation upon which the remaining curriculum consisting of 96 semester hours is tightly structured in an effort to provide students with expertise in four areas of study deemed essential for a career in world trade.

1) Fluency in a Foreign Language: In order to reverse the continuing trade imbalance between the United States and its foreign competitors, it is absolutely essential that American businessmen and women no longer suffer from the self-imposed handicap of monolingualism. It is time to take seriously the admonition by a Japanese business executive that "the language of international business is the language of the customer."

In an effort to break the shackles of monolingualism of future American business people, the first requirement for the fulfillment of the B.S. in Foreign Languages degree program is fluency in one foreign language. To achieve this goal, a minimum of 30 semester hours must be taken in one language (French, German, Spanish). Among these hours is a

two-semester, third-year conversation and composition sequence and a two-semester, third-year business-language sequence in addition to traditional course work selected from linguistics, civilization, and literature offerings. It is hoped that by means of this combination of language, business-language, civilization, linguistics, and literature courses the student will attain a degree of foreign-language proficiency to function adequately in a private or business setting on foreign soil.

Fluency in any language, however, can only be achieved through total immersion in the foreign culture. Mindful of this fact, every B.S. in Foreign Languages major at Mississippi State University is strongly encouraged to participate in a Work/Study Spring Semester Abroad Program during their junior or senior year. In this program, sponsored by Educational Programs Abroad, students have the opportunity to earn between nine and fifteen semester hours in history, political science, or economics/international business of the host country while at the same time acquiring valuable hands-on working experience in an international business in Bonn, Paris, or Madrid as determined by the language specialization of the students. This combination of total foreign-language immersion coupled with actual working experience will yield the dual benefit of achieving fluency in the foreign language while providing the student with a decided competitive edge during job placement upon graduation.

2) Proficiency in a Second Foreign Language: Recognizing the fact that most multi-national corporations deal with more than one foreign country, it seemed prudent to require adequate proficiency in a second foreign language from our B.S. in Foreign Languages majors. Although only a minimum of twelve semester hours in the second language is required, most majors progress through the two-semester, third-year conversation and composition sequence. While no one expects to attain

fluency in the second language, it is hoped that each student will acquire enough proficiency in the second language to enable him to carry on basic conversations relating to travel and business while abroad.

3) Expertise in Business/International Business: Equal in importance to acquiring fluency in a foreign language is the attainment of expertise in the area of business and international business practices for successful entry into the arena of domestic and international business. In an effort to prepare students for this dual role, the business component of the B.S. in Foreign Languages program is made up of a mixture of fundamental business courses in economics, accounting, marketing, management, and finance as well as highly specialized courses in international business. A minimum of 30 semester hours of business/international business courses is required. All of these courses are taught in the College of Business and Industry to ensure the integrity of the program. Indeed, the specific courses comprising the business component of this program were selected by the business faculty and approved by the curriculum committee of the College of Business and Industry and its Dean, thereby declaring it adequate in depth and breadth for employment in both domestic and world business ventures.

4) Awareness of the History and Political Sytems of the Country of the First Language: In order for American business people to be more successful on the international scene, they must become more familiar with the mind-set of their potential trading partners. To do this, they must familiarize themselves with the culture and mores of their foreign counterparts as evidenced by their history, customs, and political systems. American business leaders must be less insistent on "doing business our way" and become more sensitive to "doing business their way" or be prepared to "do no business today." To ensure a certain familiarity with

and sensitivity to the historical, sociological, and political factors contributing to the manner of conducting business in a foreign country, students enrolled in the B.S. in Foreign Languages program are required to complete at least six hours in both history and political science pertaining to the country of their first language. It is hoped that this familiarity, cursory though it may be, will sensitize the American business person to alternate, legitimate ways of doing business. It will help him understand and perhaps even admire other peoples' approaches to conducting business that previously appeared alien, if not primitive, to him. This insight might increase mutual trust and understanding between the trading partners which in turn may be the crucial difference between success or failure in consumating a multi-national agreement.

In summary, the B.S. in Foreign Languages degree program at Mississippi State University attempts to fill a long-term need for people interested in careers in international business. By providing a new focus for previously independent courses of study in foreign languages, business-foreign languages, business/international business, history, and political science, the B.S. in Foreign Languages succeeded in blending essential elements needed for effective performance in international business into a new degree program that offers students marketable skills of proven flexibility and relevance with the promise of even greater benefits in the future.

The impact of the B.S. in Foreign Languages degree program on the Department of Foreign Languages has been phenomenal. Since its introduction in 1984, the Department has enjoyed six consecutive records in enrollment. The number of our majors has risen from twelve to sixty-five--an increase of more than 400% in three years. We are frequently cited by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences as one of the fastest growing departments on campus. Our existence as an independent Department of Foreign Languages is

secure. Faculty morale has turned from downbeat to upbeat. Above all, however, we believe that we are contributing in a meaningful way in the preparation of our students for life and for making a living.

Sample Program

Freshman Year

First Semester		Second Semester	
EN 1103 (Eng. Comp. I)	3	EN 1113 (Eng. Comp. II).	3
FLF/FLG/FLS 1113 (Elem. Language)	3	FLF/FLG/FLS 1123 (Elem. Language)	3
CO 1003 (Fundamentals of Speech)	3	MA 1153 (College Algebra) or higher	3
Fine Arts Elective	3	Natural Science with lab	3
Natural Science with lab	3	PS 1313 or PS 1513 (Comparative Government of International Relations)	3
Total Credit Hours	15	Total Credit Hours	15

Sophomore Year

First Semester		Second Semester	
FLF/FLG/FLS 1133 (Intermediate Lang.)	3	FLF/FLG/FLS 1143 (Intermediate Lang.)	3
English Literature	3	Natural Science Elective	3
EC 1113 (Principles of Economics) .	3	EC 1123 (Principles of Economics)	3
PS 1313 or PS 1513 (Comparative . . Government of Intern'l Relations)	3	GR 1103 (Economic Geography). . .	3
History Elective (relating to primary language) . . .	3	ACC 1423 (Acct. Principles II). .	3
ACC 1413 (Acct. Principles I) . . .	3	History Elective (ralating to primary language) . . .	3
Total Credit Hours	18	Total Credit Hours	18

Junior Year

First Semester		Second Semester	
FLF/FLG 3214; FLS 3211 and FLS 3213 (Conversation and Comp.)	4	FLF/FLG 3224; FLS 3221 and FLS 3223 (Conversation and Comp.)	4
FL 2203 (Intro. to Historical and Applied Lingusitics)	3	FLF 5013 (Major Themes or Movements in Comparative Ger. and Rom. Lit.)	3
Second Elementary FL	3	Second Elementary FL	3
MGT 2113 (Principles of Management)	3	MKT 2313 (Principles of Marketing)	3
FIN 2223 (Business Finance) . . .	3	GB 3913 (Prin. of Intern'l Bus.)	3
FLF/FLG/FLS Elective	3	FLF/FLG/FLS Elective	3
Total Credit Hours	19	Total Credit Hours	19

Senior Year

First Semester		Second Semester	
FLF/FLG/FLS 3313 (Bus. Lang. I)	3	FLF/FLG/FLS (Bus. Lang. II)	3
Second Interm. FL	3	Second Interm. FL	3
PHI 2113 (Business Ethics) . .	3	EC 5323 (Intern'l Economic Relations)	3
EC 4313 (Theory of Econ. Dev.)	3	Electives	6
Electives	6	Total Credit Hours	15
Total Credit Hours	18		